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International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work

1-1-2008

Writing Sample

Andrei Grishaev

Includes "In The Pomegranates Garden," "A Stop in the Forest," "Light Paw," "Chicken and Wine," "You," "In the Hospital Windows," "A Cloud," "Dawn," "About Happiness," and "Chaffinch or Song Thrush."

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Recommended Citation

Grishaev, Andrei, "Writing Sample" (2008). *International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work*. 221.

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Andrei GRISHAYEV
Poems

In The Pomegranates Garden

The pomegranates bloom in the south.
The soldiers march through the south.
They sing merry songs as they move.

You crush a persimmon, the juice streams on your hand.
You crush a persimmon, the blood floats in the stream.
Somewhere the war is coming to an end.

It's strange and fun simply not to exist.
To enter clear water and to forget.
To drop in the grass your field cap.

Don't you let me out of your caring eyes.
We are down and happy, keep looking at us.
I know that you saved me, you did.

A Stop in the Forest

Forget the mushrooms' metaphysics.
Such topics are not suited for discussions.
The mushrooms look uneasy.
The noon is coming.

Let's settle on an enchanted log.
(The log and forest disappear.)
The mushrooms squint, it seems to me,
That death does not occur.

A random bachelor, a mushroom picker, passes.
His eyes shoot up from underneath his cap.
The rain starts rustling, young and simple, like a girl,
It's scarce and thin.

The forest moves: fir-trees are knocking.
A woman's smiling from a railroad platform.
The rain is over and my friend who's leaving
Gets off the log. The sun is at its zenith.

Light Paw

I do not believe that my cat could die.
Perhaps he could die for a third of his life.

Death grows into him from his ears to the tail.
And only one paw is remaining unscathed.

He washes himself with it day and night.
And restores his goodness and might.

Purr, fall asleep in my arms my friend.
Your paw is so soft, like a cotton wad.

When into the window the blackbirds fly,
Turn to them your redoubtable eye.

Shake your light paw at them, scare them away.
Guard yourself, protect us and save.

Chicken and Wine

“Manicure, pedicure,” that’s a scene.
Some old lady is arguing with a bum.
The sun is setting down behind a garage.
Into what?

I am going to a run-down grocery store
To purchase some chicken, to get some wine.
I hear the footsteps, “He is not guilty.”
Who is he?

This is a story without end,
But wait, what depth does it have?
If the moral is seen right away,
Then, to hell with it.

Let us say, I, probably, could
Change the rout of these careless feet.
And fly somewhere far to the East.
Say, the Far East.

Pay attention, my life.
Wherever I’d go across a sea,
Whatever thoughts I try to escape,
I am not guilty.

Accept this gift of chicken and wine,
Drink to me as if in a dream, in a film.
Even though I got it easy.
It is like blood.

You

I open my eyes and I see: you.
You lean down tenderly over me.
You have freckles and a scratch on your nose.
I remember how you pushed me off the barn.

You jumped off after me.

We read a compilation of the journal *Around the World*.
Particularly, we liked the funny inventions section.
We were impressed by the tongue case for kissing.

I invented a song:

A blue sparrow
And a green scarab
Spread their wings and
Opened their beaks...

And then, you hugged me.

The summer went by, the fall went by.
A leaf, or who knows what, fell down at my feet.
Many years went by.

And now, like a snail with its home, I am stumbling through a park.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and said, "at most a year."
I learned to like fruit.
I learned to like persimmons, apricots, kiwi, grapes and even apples.
I was sitting in front of my plate and recalling.

Recalling marriages that never happened, children that were never born,
Lost words.
And that a moment will come when none of that will be useful any longer.

A persimmon falls.

And then, I open my eyes and see: you.

In the Hospital Windows

Hospital windows breathe slumber and shame
And the quiet, indifferent air.
A sticky ribbon is hanging still,
Someone's supper is under way.

There something drips, and something sinks.
A life meanders by an I.V.; it says,
"I'm leaving now," and yet it lingers.
It's time to go, and yet it stays.

It stays to check the hallway clock,
It grabs a passport, turns the leaves,
Or puts a kettle on the stove,
And slowly starts to sip the tea.

A Cloud

I take tram number one to work.
Two always remind me of a man and a woman.
...

This is the count that does need to be continued.
You didn't live 'til eight.

There are no numbers.

I buy an approximate number of brats,
And pay with an approximate amount of money.

There is some cloud
That carries me.
There are some words
That I say.

My friend and I go fishing.
We catch sunfish.

"Nine of them, nine,"
He says proudly, and shows me the jar.

Sunfish jostle each other, my friend moves his lips.
I don't understand a word.

Dawn

The layer of the air belongs to sparrows.
Grasshoppers' home is the field turning yellow.
The realm of fish is the curve of drift-weed.
The dawn is quietly rising before me.

Were you a fish, were you a funny bird?
Were you a grasshopper? Why did you have to die?
You rise before me wearing new clothes.
You tell me, "I waited for you so long."

This is my home: the water, the air, the land.
None of this will ever become true.
You will enter my room, bringing with you light.
Flames from you will never inflict harm.

About Happiness

The sounds in the park were sparkling,
And Moscow floated in the moonlight.
A pitiful chaffinch stayed up singing.
Its song was striking in the fall night.

The windows up there high were glowing.
Far off on the other side.
A hoisting crane's lantern was on,
And barges drifted with their lights.

I kept on walking: I thought of light
That shines bright throughout the night,
And of a bird whose song said there
Was neither happiness, nor death.

Chaffinch or Song Thrush

Is it a chaffinch or a song thrush? I wish I knew,
Which one of them peeks with a sharp round eye.

What kind of a person you have inside
Doesn't believe that he has been told?

I go to the balcony, take off my shirt;
My yard moves like a tremendous bird.

There's a little girl in a simple dress
Made out of dainty blue cotton

She leans forward to pick up a twig.
She is separate, serious and sincere,

She suddenly looks up like her mother did,
Staring through the troubles and tears.

You won't believe it, my little friend,
Shining with iridescent feathers,

I suddenly see all around me
Through this little girl's sharp vision.

I see myself at twenty-eight,
Stunned in the dust of May.

And in the motionless amber light,
A bird that hasn't been told apart.

Chaffinch or song thrush? Of course, a thrush!
I have been freed by her innocent look.

The sun is invisible through the tears,
And somewhere near – a closed book.

All poems translated by Masha Petrenko